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ABSTRACT

This extended essay looks at higher education in Europe and broad issues of its role and the development of individual institutions. Chapter 1, "Higher Education and an Evolving Europe," discusses the "Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community" which urged higher education institutions to adapt to evolving, modern, European conditions. There follows a discussion of the current implementation of the Memorandum's recommendations. Chapter 2, "New Challenges and Good Reputations," argues that institutions will not compromise their quality by addressing contemporary challenges but will, through improved quality in both research and teaching, both respond to society's current needs and qualify as a good university in the next century. The balance of the chapter touches on the role of the university and of the intellectual in moral and social debates of the time. Chapter 3, "A Basic and General Education," asks whether universities will be able to maintain or restore a basic and general education as a value in its own right with an ethical dimension. The author argues that market pressures suggest that universities should profile and promote their individual assets or strong points. Contains seven references. (JB)

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UNIVERSITY PROFILING AND IDENTITY

J. Van der PERRE

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UNIVERSITY PROFILING AND IDENTITY

J. Van der PERRE

Bucharest

1994

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. J. Van Der Perre, who was born in 1939 and educated at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, holds licentiate degrees in classical philology and in sociology, both earned *magna cum laude*. As a specialist in science and education policy, he has held major positions in government and in the academic world in Belgium. He is currently the Secretary-General of the Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad*). He has published extensively in the areas of education, research, and science policy as well as in classical philology.

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FOREWORD

Global, regional, and local challenges are growing around contemporany universities, while their messages are not always and necessarily homogeneous. As they themselves receive diversified messages, universities cannot refrain from reflecting on their own identities. In this respect, Dr. Van der Perre looks at the university from an academic perspective and stresses those dimensions which preserve its academic profile and identity.

This view is certainly one among others. CEPES is expecting to publish other essays focussed on the topic of the European academic heritage and of the new connotations attached to the idea of the *university* in the world of today, thus continuing this series of publications.

Lazăr Vlăsceanu
Programme Specialist

Chapter 1

HIGHER EDUCATION AND AN EVOLVING EUROPE

In the much debated, **Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community**[1], those persons responsible for higher education - institutions as well as authorities, - are urged to adapt to evolving modern, European conditions and to address five main challenges:

i. to increase participation in - and access to - higher education, not only for the transitional age-groups but also for older students, and to provide for them a much more diversified, but nevertheless well structured, system of post-secondary education;

ii. to establish a much closer and general relationship with industrial life. The University Enterprise Training Partnerships (COMETT-Programme) are cited as a model for further developments in this context;

iii. to engage more strongly and more seriously in continuing education and to create a new equilibrium between initial training and continuing education;

[1] Edited by the Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 1991.

iv. to extend the provision of open and distant education in continuing and in initial training;

v. to develop the European dimension in higher education through the mobility of students, co-operation among institutions, language learning, the integration of Europe into the curriculum, especially in teacher training, the recognition of diplomas and study periods, etc.

For most European universities, the **Memorandum**, set against the background of the difficult socio-economic situation in Europe (recession, unemployment), is not creating new trends. Rather, it is reinforcing existing developments, plans, and intentions in dramatic ways.

The Liaison Committee of European Community Rectors' Conferences (LC) and the Standing Conference of Rectors, Presidents, and Vice-Chancellors of the European Universities (CRE):

> "welcome the attempt to increase intake into higher education without lowering standards[2], while noting that the expansion of the student population already constitutes one of the major changes in post-war higher education;

[2] Reactions of the Liaison Committee of EC Rectors' Conference (LC) and of the Standing Conference of Rectors, Presidents, and Vice-Chancellors of the European Universities (CRE) to the **Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community** (Brussels-Geneva, 1992), p. 7.

fully support the **Memorandum** in several areas "such as the importance attached to the knowledge of languages, to continuing education, and to the development of quantitative networks";[3]

are under the impression that the **Memorandum**... seems to underestimate the significant efforts of most universities to improve their economic services. Indeed, many universities have in recent years developed:

- professional units for purposes of expertise, contract rules, and patenting;
- a set of rules with regard to intellectual property rights;
- science parks for technological firms;
- incubation centres for new businesses;

and have even participated... in new spin-off enterprises emanating from academic research.

In most Member States, academic programmes and curricula are regularly adjusted in response to changing concepts of the nature of the university and to new needs and developments in the market place. The contributions of the sector to continuing education are ever increasing. New systems of quality assessment are in operation or in prepara-

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

tion. On the other hand..., applied and short-term research required by university clients, for instance, industrial research contracts, is increasing steadily, often to the detriment of fundamental research".[4]

"Even from an economic point of view, industrialists and economic decision-makers should be aware of the fact that, in terms of basic research, universities remain very competitive with industry, even though the latter disposes of far greater financial means".[5]

On the other hand, the Liaison Committee and CRE submitted proposals for the further development of a European and international dimension in higher education, through

- qualitative educational mobility on the basis of free networking;
- the promotion of language learning (in essence, through the promotion of trilingualism, *i.e.*, the practical knowledge of three languages, including English), and by making language qualifications desirable for entry into - and compulsory for exit from - higher education;
- the "Europeanization" of the curriculum, through the inclusion of a module on "Community Studies" in basic university and higher education, and the incorporation

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

of European and international aspects in university and open university courses.

Despite the broad consensus on the new challenges, a great deal of work no doubt remains to be done, particularly in the following areas:

- *continuing education*, for which the offer as well as the demand remain rather weak in many European countries. On the university side, continuing education requires additional efforts with respect to guidance, to flexible programming (*e.g.*, tailor-made course packets) and organization (*e.g.*, evening, weekend, and summer courses), and to methods (well supported self-study by working adults). On the other hand, work places need to encourage and to stimulate continuous job-related education;
- *internationalization*, in particular the possibilities for mobility of younger staff and for medium-term mobility, for example, in the context of research schools or of centres of expertise, are still a matter of preoccupation;
- *educational methods*, particularly the use of open and distant education techniques and the creation of a climate supporting self-study. As these have not yet broken through, ways must be found to better prepare students for continuous learning and to provide education at lower costs;
- *differentiated systems of learning*, responding to the various talents and to the different qualifications needed,

while maintaining a global coherence - a global network in which the student can move easily from one type of institution or programme to another;

- the *socio-cultural services* of the university in a region or a community in which the contributions of universities to the cultures of their communities are essential for their survival. Indeed, in Europe the survival of cultural differentiation is of primary importance, it being a major source of creativity and of economic competition;

- *human resources* management by which a new balance should be created between permanent, full-time staff, and hopefully, an expanding group of temporary academic staff, for example, part-time visiting professors or experts *from society*.

Chapter 2

NEW CHALLENGES AND GOOD REPUTATIONS

A question often asked is whether or not a university which concentrates on all the new or more critical challenges cited in the last chapter will continue to qualify as a good university at the beginning of the next century.

No doubt, the maintenance of a high level of scientific capability will continue to constitute the core business of universities. Given the scientific and social sophistication of today, this goal is already not an easy one to achieve.

Moreover, *quality in basic research and teaching* is the breeding ground and therefore the prerequisite or *conditio sine qua non* for a university to respond to new challenges. Such responding is in essence a *by-product* of the basic functions of a university. Universities are bound by a double loyalty: to universal science and to their communities.

To make matters more complicated, basic education and free fundamental research are being challenged on their own. The challenges in question, given their essential character, are more directly related to the future identity of the university.

In the field of research, the question is whether or not the universities will be able to replace curiosity-driven research at the heart of the life of the institution by the organization

of client-related investigation, by and large, as a by-product of the institution.

In the field of education, the key question is whether or not the universities will be able to organize education, in the words of the Liaison Committee and CRE, as "a cultural value in its own right with an ethical dimension. Indeed, academic education is based on scientific knowledge. Its aim should be to encourage critical and responsible thinking". And: "there is general agreement that basic university education, concentrating more on problem-solving than on the accumulation of knowledge, also offers the best guarantee for adapting to changes and new challenges, and that it constitutes an excellent preparation for life-long learning.[1]

Many - if not most - professors, students, and university watchers doubt that the provision of general education by universities is still a realistic possibility.

In a discipline, the student may well be provided with a professional - scientific *habitus* (attitude), implying that only information which stands up to reasonable questioning and which can be proven is reliable and worthy of trust. But human beings, their world and their science, not only offer a variety of outlooks, leading to disciplinary, fragmented, specialized approaches; they also hold a unity.

[1] Reactions of the Liaison Committee of EC Rectors' Conference (LC) ..., p. 10.

In the university, "the relatively homogeneous group of scientists has fallen apart: the (natural) sciences and the humanities (arts) have lost sight of one another, and even philosophy, traditionally the umbrella discipline, has disintegrated into partial disciplines and even specializations.... In the words of B. Veschaffel," science today effectively asserts its influence on daily life, but lacks a unified vision of humankind and of the world". In addition, specialization and fragmentation tend to make global questions, including ethical issues, invisible, whereas universities had the tradition of educating in *artes liberales*, in knowledge for its own sake, relating only to the dignity and the civilization of the free human being.

If the feasibility of a university education, which includes not only specialization, but also a more global approach with a cultural and ethical dimension, has become a major problem, the need for such an education is widely recognized, especially outside the university walls.

In his farewell address (1993) to the Liaison Committee, H. C. Jones, Director of the Task Force Human Resources, expressed the view that "what we need most now is a vision of the future" and ...universities" should be ready to work on intersectorial problems on an interdisciplinary basis and in European partnership; they must contribute more to the solution of Europe's major problems...".

These problems are well-known. The development of the poorer and currently unstable nations of central and eastern Europe must be supported in a dramatic and rapid way. Economic recession and massive unemployment in Europe

must be countered by job creation and through new solidarities. European integration must be reconciled with the survival and even the promotion of the different European cultures, Europe's main asset. Above all, the credibility gap between the authorities of the European Union and the individual citizen must be reduced, since the challenges require more co-operation, not less. A credible vision both of Europe and of international co-operation is needed and, in this context, the role of the university sector is of particular importance as well.

The Flemish Minister of Education, L. van den Bossche, repeatedly insisted that the universities maintain or restore a general education component in their curricula,[2] whereas the leader of the Flemish Liberal Party, G. Verhofstadt, in a recent discussion with the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR.) insisted that the universities should again become breeding grounds for new ideas and developments and a forum for directing essential societal debates.

> I do not expect, or seek, universities and colleges steeped only in Adam Smith, Friedrich von Hayek, and Milton Friedman. Universities should not be the seminaries of right, left, or centre. They should be the last places on earth where a group mind predominates, where there are politically correct answers, where men and women are automatically seen as creatures of circumstances rather than masters of destiny. Where also will the morrow be taken by

[2] Cfr. Vlaamse Raad (Flemish Council), **Beknopt Verslag van de vergadering van de Commissie Onderwijs** (Short proceedings of the meeting of the Commission for Education) dd. 27/4/93.

> the scruff of the neck if not in our leading colleges ...? I want the university to coruscate enlightment, to put into the intellectual firmament a constellation of talents, ideas, and educated people." "... Let serendipity thrive. Let universities turn their minds to the big issues of our generation. Let them rebuild their doors and widen their horizons. It would be good to welcome them back to a central place in our nation's story.[3]

In a speech about the personal responsibility and the role of the intellectual in a changing Europe, G. Konrad defines the academic as "the institutionalized intellectual", whereas the intellectual is a person "who wants to understand".[4] In his view, the university student and graduate is not only responsible for himself or herself, but also for everything which their contemporaries cause or bring about. Indeed, the human being is a moral entity; men and women need a justification for their actions; and intellectuals produce reasons and justifications. In addition, an intellectual does not participate in what seems to be wrong.

H. Riesenhuber, German Minister for Science Policy, invited scientists to clarify broader connections and cohesions and to co-operate above disciplinary boundaries, in order to arrive at a consensus that the dignity of the human being must remain the fundamental principle all for ethical rules.[5]

[3] J. Redwood, Secretary of State for Wales, in: **The Times** (25 April 1994).

[4] G. Konrad, **Von Persönliches Verantwortung und der Moral der Verweigerung: die Rolle des Intellektuellen in einem sich Wandelenden Europa** (Frankfurt, 1991).

[5] H. Riesenhuber, "Einheit der Wissenchaften (Unity of Sciences)", **BMFT Journal** 4 (April, 1991):3.

Chapter 3

A BASIC AND GENERAL EDUCATION

Will the universities be able to maintain or to restore a basic and general education, as a value in its own right, with an ethical dimension?

A first answer to this question may be in another question. If the universities are not capable of providing this service, will it be provided by some other institution(s)? Should this education be provided outside the universities, like much of cultural life? And in that case, what will the new identity of the universities be?

A second answer might be that in the future the ways in which universities operate and concretely translate *general education* might be different according to the specific character, the specific profile of each university.

Rector H. Martens recently expressed the view that the role which his university is playing in the social reconversion of its province is an example of the new social contract between the university and its surroundings.

According to this Rector, because Flemish universities now have increased autonomy, they must increasingly justify themselves. They must increasingly take market forces into account. The choosing student is a consumer of education.

The choosing organizations, public authorities, and enterprises are consumers of research and services. The activities in which decisions can be made in full intellectual independance represent only a small part of the total number, but the small part "remains for us one of the major elements of a university". This market situation at the same time leads, in the opinion of the Rector, to competition as well as to national and international co-operation. Universities should profile; they must in particular present their assets or strong points. Through co-operation in complementary networks, a university may strengthen its competitive position.[1]

In their current situation in which they are confronted with increasingly sophisticated science, with growing, complicated demands from inside and from outside, and with the duty of preserving a valuable tradition, universities will have to develop profiles.

Profiling necessitates:

- *autonomy*: "even if [the latter] is based on governmental guidelines" since doing so "constitutes a prerequisite for the survival of their individual identit[ies]". Autonomy is needed to accommodate profiling and to meet the considerable task of responding to new demands and developments, which require diversified responses at a decentralized, institutional level. Moreover, experi-

[1] H. Martens, **Speech at the Opening of the Academic Year at the Limburg University Center** (Limburg, 1993).

ence shows that autonomous institutions are better able to control costs. Universities... acknowledge the responsibility linked to autonomy, and welcome the development of systems of quality assessment...;[2]

- *credible engagements*: if a university, for example, chooses among other tasks, to provide a general, basic education, then this engagement must be made credible in its mission statement, in the credibility of the professors concerned, in its ways of contracting, in its financial allocations, in its curricula, and through quality assessment. Every major objective which a university chooses to pursue needs a specific management.

[2] Liaison Committee of the EC Rectors' Conference (LC)..., p. 10.

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